



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

**DECISION NOTICE
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
TELLESCH FUR FARM**

October 25, 2017

Description of the Proposed Project:

Mr. Tellesch has applied for a fur farm license to possess a breeding pair of bobcats for the purpose of raising and selling bobcats as pets. The facility is located in Coram, Montana, at 205 Caribou Street in Flathead County (T31N, R19W, Section 20).

The bobcats will be housed in a large outdoor enclosure equipped with a fish pond, individual sleeping hutches, climbing structures, perches, heated waterer, and enrichment equipment. The dimensions for the enclosure are approximately 16' x 50' and 25' tall, with one exterior gate. The enclosure is fully fenced, and the fence is buried and secured to the ground. The fencing is 3" x 5" sheep wire. The entire enclosure is covered with a metal pitched roof and is in a shaded area surrounded by trees, protecting the bobcats from inclement weather and direct sun. Within the enclosure, there are individual breeding cages for each of the cats. The cages are constructed of 1"x 1" wire, are elevated approximately 30" off the ground and are 4' x 4' x 10'. Each breeding pen possesses a sleeping igloo, perches, food, and water.

The bobcats will be vaccinated against diseases, such as distemper, annually and protected against parasites.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review on September 13, 2017, and asked for public comment through October 13, 2017. The draft EA was posted on FWP's official website, and was also available at the Region One headquarters in Kalispell, online for people with internet access, or through internet service at public libraries.

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

1. Preferred Alternative: FWP would issue the permit to allow Mr. Tellesch to breed bobcats at his facility in Coram.
2. No Action Alternative: FWP would deny the permit to allow Mr. Tellesch to breed bobcats at his facility in Coram.

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received four public comments: two opposed, one in favor, and one letter asking for additional information and conditions placed on the permit.

1. Three comments were opposed to raising and keeping bobcats as pets.

FWP Response: *In Montana, it is legal to possess bobcats without a permit if the ownership, control, or propagation is not for the sale of conveyance of furbearers or parts thereof; however, a fur farm license is required if the intent of the possession is to sell the furbearer or its parts or offspring. All furbearers held on a fur farm or in private possession must have been obtained legally from captive stock and may not be obtained from the wild. The animals held by this fur farm permit will be obtained from captive stock. A change in these regulations would require legislative action.*

2. Glacier National Park had several additional comments that will be addressed here:

Glacier National Park is concerned that the bobcats possessed by Mr. Tellesch may be released into the park and could become a public safety concern in and around the park.

FWP Response: *No furbearers, including bobcats, may be released into the wild at any time without authorization from the Fish & Wildlife Commission. Therefore, legally, these animals cannot be released without prior authorization.*

There was concern that the presence of the fur farm could potentially impact lynx and grizzly bears in the area. There was concern that the bobcat facility would be dirty and attract grizzly bears, that would then be euthanized or cause conflicts in Glacier National Park.

FWP Response: *The bobcat enclosure will at times contain food for the individual cats; however, we have no reason to believe that the enclosure will not be cleaned regularly or will necessarily be "dirty." Regardless, we do not feel that the enclosure will be an attractant for grizzly bears in the neighborhood, as we have yet responded to any conflicts between fur farms and grizzly bears in Northwest Montana. In response, we will stipulate in the permit that the enclosure be cleaned of waste and excess food daily to prevent potential conflicts with bears.*

The Park commented that the EA should have indicated "UNKNOWN" under that question of introduction of a new species into the area, instead of "NONE."

FWP Response: *According to state law, all furbearers held on a fur farm or in private possession must have been obtained legally from captive stock and may not be obtained from the wild. Currently, there are both wild and domestic bobcats in the area, and therefore, no new species will be introduced to the area with the issuance of this permit.*

The Park requested responses to the following questions: "How will potential buyers of these bobcats be vetted to ensure that they are aware of the burden they are about to take on? Who will ensure that the buyers have adequate facilities to prevent bobcat pets from escaping and becoming a potential threat to the environment and local residents and wildlife? Will buyers be required to have a facility similar to Mr. Tellesch's? If so, who will be responsible for inspecting those to ensure they meet standards?"

FWP Response: *In Montana, it is legal to possess bobcats without a permit if the ownership, control, or propagation is not for the sale of conveyance of furbearers or parts thereof; however, a fur farm license is required if the intent of the possession is to sell the furbearer or its parts or offspring. A change in these regulations would require legislative action. Therefore, there is no permit required to possess a bobcat as a pet. FWP does not maintain a*

database of all people in the state who have pet bobcats, nor do we require any type of minimum facility for those people who have bobcats as pets. If a buyer requests a permit to establish a fur farm to profit from rearing or selling bobcats or parts, then FWP has regulatory authority over ensuring that facility meets certain standards before a permit is issued.

There was concern that if a bobcat escaped from the facility, they would not be distinguishable from wild bobcats.

FWP Response: *We will stipulate in the permit that all bobcats at the facility be ear-tagged to distinguish them from wild bobcats.*

The question was asked if offspring would be spayed and neutered prior to being sold to prevent potential breeding with native, wild bobcats.

FWP Response: *FWP does not require spaying or neutering of the bobcats prior to sale. If Mr. Tellesch is so inclined, he can stipulate that requirement in his adoption agreement when placing bobcat kittens raised at his facility.*

FWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision Recommendation

In reviewing all the public comment and other relevant information, and evaluating the environmental effects, I recommend that the Fur Farm license be issued as proposed in the Preferred Alternative with the additional stipulations that the facility is cleaned daily of waste and excess food to reduce potential bear attractants, and that the bobcats at the facility be ear-tagged to be identified from wild bobcats.

Through the public review process described above, several members of the public and Glacier National park expressed opposition to allowing a pet trade for bobcats in Montana. Currently, the possession of bobcats as pets is legal and not regulated by FWP, and a change in this law would require legislative action. FWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal; therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Noting and including the responses to public comments, the draft EA will become the final EA and together with this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this proposal.



Neil Anderson
Wildlife Manager

10/25/17

Date